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DE RUEHLM #0567/01 1471232  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 271232Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0038  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1213  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1700  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8712  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6946  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5005  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3078  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4964  
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RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6641  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1171  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3557  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000567

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2019

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: BAN KI-MOON BRIEFS CO-CHAIR AMBASSADORS  
ON VISIT

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: In his messages to the government during a 24-hour visit to Sri Lanka on May 23, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon emphasized the key points of the need for a political process and reconciliation, better access by humanitarian workers to the IDP camps, early IDP returns, and greater accountability on human rights. In a briefing to Co-Chair Ambassadors just prior to his departure, he described conditions at Manik Farm as sobering and sad and said the no-fire was a scene of "complete destruction." He felt no purpose would be served by continuing to press for international access to the no-fire zone, saying the priority instead must be expediting the return of IDPs to their homes.

In his meeting with President Rajapaksa, the Secretary General pressed for greater accountability in addressing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, reference to which was retained in the joint statement over despite GSL resistance. End summary.

12. (C) UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon briefed Co-Chair Ambassadors in Colombo at the airport on the night of May 23 at the end of his 24-hour visit to Sri Lanka, which included meetings with President Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Bogollagama, and other senior government officials; a tour of IDP camps at Manik Farm, near Vavuniya; and a fly over of the former "no-fire zone," where the Army and LTTE fought their final battles and tens of thousands of civilians were kept against their will by the LTTE and trapped in the crossfire between the two sides.

13. (C) The Secretary General told Co-Chair Ambassadors that he focused in his visit on three key priorities: (a) ensuring adequate assistance to the nearly 300,000 persons who were displaced by the conflict; (b) the early resettlement of the IDPs in their homes and reconstruction of northern Sri Lanka; and (c) the need for political dialogue and reconciliation between the government and minority groups, particularly Tamils.

Calls for Unimpeded Access to Camps

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¶4. (C) Ban said he pressed the government repeatedly on the need to provide humanitarian workers "unimpeded access" to the IDP camps. Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes noted that the government undertook to provide access but was short on specifics, saying, in effect, "we'll sort it out." (Note: In the week prior to Ban's visit, authorities restricted vehicular access to the camps except for the delivery of food, shelter, and other required items. The government claimed that the large number of UN and INGO vehicles driving through the camps was disruptive to the residents and increased the risk of suspected LTTE cadres "escaping" from the camps. Some UN agencies and INGO staff had access, but clear, uniform procedures had not yet been put into place. End note.)

¶5. (C) The Secretary General reported that he also raised concern over the government's continued detention of three government doctors who are accused of providing inaccurate information to the media about civilian casualties and the number of civilians in the no-fire zone. The Foreign Minister undertook to seek to expedite their release, while Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa referred to them as the "LTTE doctors;" the President was non-committal. Ban also pressed the GSL to release three UN local staff members who are still being held in IDP camps. He was promised that they would be released as soon as their identities were confirmed.

Early Return of IDPs to Homes Essential

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¶6. (C) President Rajapaksa stressed that demining of the formerly LTTE-controlled areas was a prerequisite for IDP returns to their homes. Ban replied that the international community is prepared to assist with demining. The Secretary General welcomed the government's commitment, reiterated by the President in their meeting, to resettle 80 percent of the IDPs by the end of 2009.

War Over, Political Process Must Begin  
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¶7. (C) Ban urged the President to reach out to minority groups, particularly Tamils and Muslims, and develop a comprehensive plan to devolve power. He called for implementation of the 13th Amendment. The President responded that the amendment is part of Sri Lanka's constitution and he plans to implement the "13th Amendment plus one," without elaborating. (Comment: Rajapaksa was likely referring to adding an upper house to Parliament, a plan the President previewed in Ambassador's May 20 farewell call on him. End comment.) Ban cautioned the President that although the war may be over, if the reconciliation process is not properly handled there would be a danger of recurring LTTE violence.

Human Rights a Key Focus of Visit  
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¶8. (C) Ban also pressed the government on the need for improved protection of human rights. He praised the President for his work early in his political career as a champion of human rights and stressed that the human rights of IDPs must be protected at this sensitive time. In particular, he called for greater accountability of human rights violations. He told the President that concrete action on human rights would be instrumental in building support from donor countries for the reconstruction of the North. Ban offered UN technical assistance with mechanisms to provide greater human rights accountability and with moving forward on a political solution to the underlying causes of the conflict. He reported that the President was non-committal in response to both offers.

## "Complete Devastation" in No-fire Zone

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¶9. (C) At the conclusion of the 15-minute briefing, Ban noted his appreciation of the Co-Chairs, strong and continuing engagement with the GSL on humanitarian and human rights issues, early resettlement, and political reconciliation. In response to a question from Norwegian Ambassador Hattrem about his assessment of conditions at Manik Farm, Ban said his visit there had been "very sobering and very sad." He said the conditions were worse than those at any other camps, including in Darfur and Goma, that he had visited, and noted he had seen signs of malnutrition. Asked about his flyover of the no-fire zone, Ban described seeing "complete devastation" and no movement of human beings. He commented that in the absence of adequate shelter and even trees for shade, the civilians "must have suffered terribly."

¶10. (C) Charge asked the Secretary General whether he had raised with the government the question of access by the international community to the no-fire zone and the degree to which we should continue to push for that. Ban replied that they did not raise this specifically. John Holmes said the time for that had passed since there was no sign of any remaining civilians. Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe agreed and added that the priority for the international community now must be to work for the early return of the IDPs to their homes.

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## Comment

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¶11. (C) The Secretary General put down clear markers on the critical issues of political reconciliation, human rights accountability, humanitarian access, and early returns of the IDPs. Ban's focus on human rights accountability was especially important. Although he did not specifically elaborate on what type of technical assistance with this the UN could make available and the President did not express immediate interest in pursuing this offer, the fact that it was raised by the Secretary General provides a foundation on which we will seek to build in coordination with the local UN office. The last paragraph of the joint statement (full text follows below) calls for human rights accountability and it was that part of the text which generated, according to Ban, intense last minute negotiations with Foreign Secretary Kohona and senior presidential advisors. The UN prevailed in retaining the proposed language which calls for "an accountability process for addressing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law," making clear that this must be a high priority. End comment.

¶12. (U) Following is the text, dated May 23, of the Joint Statement at the Conclusion of the UN Secretary General's visit to Sri Lanka:

At the invitation of the H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Ban Ki-moon paid a visit to Sri Lanka. During the course of his visit, he held talks with the President, Foreign Minister as well as other senior leaders of Sri Lanka. During his stay, he also consulted other relevant stakeholders, members of the international humanitarian agencies and civil society. The Secretary-General visited the IDP sites at Vavuniya and overflew the conflict area, near Mallaitivu that was the scene of the conflict.

President Rajapaksa welcomed the Secretary-General as the highest dignitary to visit Sri Lanka in the post-conflict phase. This was a reflection of the close cooperation between Sri Lanka and the United Nations as well as Sri Lanka's commitment to work with the UN in the future.

President Rajapaksa and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon agreed that following the end of operations against the LTTE, Sri Lanka had entered a new post-conflict beginning. In this context, the Government of Sri Lanka faces many immediate and long-term challenges relating to issues of relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and reconciliation. While addressing these critical issues, it was agreed that the new situation offered opportunities for long-term development of the North and for re-establishing democratic institutions and electoral politics after 2 1/2 decades. The Government expressed its commitment to ensure the economic and political empowerment of the people of the North through its programmes.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Secretary-General agreed that addressing the aspirations and grievances of all communities and working towards a lasting political solution was fundamental to ensuring long-term socio-economic development. The Secretary-General welcomed the assurance of the President of Sri Lanka contained in his Statement in Parliament on 19th May 2009 that a national solution acceptable to all sections of people will be evolved. President Rajapaksa expressed his firm resolve to proceed with the implementation of the 13th Amendment, as well as to begin a broader dialogue with all parties, including the Tamil parties in the new circumstances, to further enhance this process and to bring about lasting peace and development

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in Sri Lanka.

President Rajapaksa and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon discussed a series of areas in which the United Nations will assist the ongoing efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka in addressing the future challenges and opportunities.

With regards of IDPs, the United Nations will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the IDPs now in Vavuniya and Jaffna. The Government will continue to provide access to humanitarian agencies. The Government will expedite the necessary basic and civil infrastructure as well as means of livelihood necessary for the IDPs to resume their normal lives at the earliest. The Secretary-General welcomed the announcement by the Government expressing its intention to dismantle the welfare villages at the earliest as outlined in the Plan to resettle the bulk of IDPs and call for its early implementation.

The Government seeks the cooperation of the international community in mine-clearing which is an essential prerequisite to expediting the early return of IDPs.

The Secretary-General called for donor assistance towards the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) jointly launched by the GOSL and the UN, which supports the relief, shelter and humanitarian needs of those in IDP sites. President Rajapaksa and the Secretary-General recognized that the large number of former child soldiers forcibly recruited by the LTTE as an important issue in the post-conflict context. President Rajapaksa reiterated his firm policy of zero tolerance in relation to child recruitment. In cooperation with UNICEF, child-friendly procedures have been established for their "release and surrender" and rehabilitation in Protective Accommodation Centres. The objective of the rehabilitation process presently underway is to reintegrate former child soldiers into society as productive citizens. The Secretary-General expressed satisfaction on the progress already made by the Government in cooperation with UNICEF and encouraged Sri Lanka to adopt similar policies and procedures relating to former child soldiers in the North.

President Rajapaksa informed the UN Secretary-General regarding ongoing initiatives relating to rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-combatants. In addition to the ongoing work by the office of the Commissioner General for

Rehabilitation, a National Framework for the Integration of Ex-Combatant into Civilian Life is under preparation, with the assistance of the UN and other International Organizations.

Sri Lanka reiterated its strongest commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights in keeping with international human rights standards and Sri Lanka's international obligations. The Secretary General underlined the importance of the accountability process for addressing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The Government will take measures to address those grievances.

MOORE